

AWARDS 2007 NETWORKS

EXPERT'S REPORT

Draft-N wireless routers have become cheaper and more reliable than ever in the past year, and the number and range of VoIP products has increased dramatically. This made choosing our favourite networking product tricky, but in the end we picked a wireless router that we think encompasses *Shopper's* values: good value, great performance and ease of use. We couldn't ignore the advances in Draft-N products, though, so our second award goes to the best 802.11n product we've seen this year.

We wanted to give other technologies their due, so our third award goes to a product that could replace WiFi if you're having reliability problems.

Finally, VoIP is now incredibly popular, so our pick helps you make the most of your Skype account.

Matt Smith

Notebooks and networks expert

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BUFFALO WMBR-G125

With so many advances in Draft-N wireless technology recently, you may be mildly surprised to see that we've given our Best Network Product 2007 award to an 802.11g wireless router. Far from being bog-standard, though, Buffalo's WMBR-G125 is everything an award-winning product should be. For starters, it costs just £48 including VAT, making it much cheaper than any Draft-N product. Considering that it has an ADSL modem too, it really is very good value.

Price isn't everything, though, and we like our award winners to offer something special. In the WMBR-G125's case it's performance. Using a Centrino notebook, the throughputs of 19.2Mbit/s at close range and 14.2Mbit/s at long range are great; but it's the 3.1Mbit/s at 25m that's stunning.

Switch to the WLI-CB-G54S CardBus adaptor (which costs around £18) and things really start to take off, as the router can use its 125Mbit/s turbo mode. With the adaptor, we managed to get throughputs of 28Mbit/s at close range and a stunning 20.9Mbit/s at long range. The 3.9Mbit/s at 25m is more than enough for web browsing.

We've seen better performance from Draft-N routers, but not by much, and they've all cost nearly double what the WMBR-G125 costs. If you're looking to share a network connection reliably and want the option for some file sharing, this is the perfect router.

Buffalo manages to get so many other things right, too. It's simple to configure and uses Buffalo's AirStation One Touch Secure System (AOSS), so you



can send configuration settings to clients quickly. Just one touch of the AOSS button on the router and a click of the software button on the client PC is all you need to securely add a new computer to your wireless network. The entire process took less than two minutes when we tried it, and it worked flawlessly.

If you need to get into the router's management controls and change some of the more complicated settings, you'll find the web interface easy to use. You can access all the advanced features, including dynamic DNS and Quality of Service (QoS) to give priority to sensitive network traffic, such as VoIP.

It may not quite have all the bells and whistles of Draft-N wireless routers, but the WMBR-G125 doesn't need them. It's well priced, incredibly easy to set up, has stunning throughputs and is ideal for anyone looking to share an ADSL connection. It's the clear winner of our Best Network Product 2007 award.

ADSL2+ MODEM ROUTER 802.11g (125Mbit/s), 4x 10/100 Ethernet ports, WAN Port (ADSL2+ modem), UPnP, QoS **PART CODE** WMBR-G125 **LATEST PRICE** £48 inc VAT from www.lambda-tek.com **DETAILS** www.buffalotech.com **FULL REVIEW** Nov 2007



LINKSYS WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway

No Draft-N router has impressed us as much as Linksys's WAG325N. We tested it with a Linksys CardBus adaptor (£57) and got the fastest speed we've ever seen from a wireless router: 66.3Mbit/s at close range. At 25m we still got 7.5Mbit/s, which is amazing.

The router is also very easy to configure, thanks to Linksys's CD-based configuration wizard, which took us through setting up our internet connection, wireless settings and security.

If you want the best performance from a wireless router, perhaps for file sharing or streaming HD video, Linksys's WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway is the product to buy. It wins our Best Wireless Router 2007 award.



WIRELESS ADSL ROUTER Draft 802.11n (300Mbit/s), 4x 10/100 Ethernet ports, WAN port (ADSL2+ modem) **PART CODE** WAG325N **LATEST PRICE** £86 from www.lambda-tek.com **DETAILS** www-uk.linksys.com **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007



D-LINK DHP-301

No matter how good wireless seems to get, there are always those homes, or at least parts of them, where WiFi fails to work. In these situations, turning to HomePlug is a good idea.

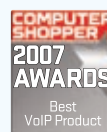
D-Link's DHP-301 kit consists of two 200Mbit/s HomePlug AV Ethernet adaptors.

Performance was the big thing that attracted us to this kit, with throughputs of 59.4Mbit/s coming close to the fastest Draft-N performance we've seen.

D-Link's DHP-301 kit is very reasonably priced compared with other HomePlug AV kits we've reviewed, and makes the perfect alternative to wireless where you have problems. For these reasons, it wins our Best HomePlug Product 2007 award.



POWERLINE NETWORKING KIT Two 200Mbit/s HomePlug AV Ethernet adaptors **PART CODE** DHP-301 **LATEST PRICE** £96 inc VAT from www.lambda-tek.com **DETAILS** www.dlink.co.uk **FULL REVIEW** Oct 2007



PHILIPS VOIP841

Rather than tying you to your PC when you make a VoIP call, Philips' VOIP841 enables you to use your Skype account as you would a normal phone.

The DECT handset connects to a base station that plugs directly into your router, enabling you to make VoIP calls. However, it also connects to your landline, so you can use your regular line, too.

We've reviewed similar products, but none provides the VOIP841's call quality. Standard calls sounded amazing and Skype calls sounded as if they were made over a landline. Philips' VOIP841 is the perfect way to make more of your Skype account, it's incredibly easy to use and wins our Best VoIP Product 2007 award.



SKYPE PHONE Base station, Ethernet and landline connection, docking station, 500-entry address book, 120 hours' standby time, 12 hours' talk time **PART CODE** VOIP841 **LATEST PRICE** £112 from www.broadbandstuff.co.uk **DETAILS** www.philips.com **FULL REVIEW** Jun 2007



D-LINK DKT-410

★★★★

£95 inc VAT

D-Link's DKT-410 is a Draft-N kit that includes a RangeBooster N 650 wireless router with Ethernet WAN port (originally reviewed in *Labs*, *Shopper* November 2006), and a DWA-140 USB wireless adaptor. Buying both products individually would cost around £126, making this kit excellent value, especially as it's covered by an 11-year warranty.

Initial configuration is through a CD-based setup wizard. Rather than making installation easier, this felt as if it were aimed at people with experience of wireless networks, which could leave users feeling baffled if they've never set up a wireless router before.

We tested the router with our Centrino notebook first. Performance at close range was quick, but we've seen better from other Draft-N routers before. At long range there was little drop-off in performance, and the 2.9Mbit/s at 25m is good enough for web browsing.

Unfortunately, we experienced problems when we switched to the USB adaptor. Changing the router's settings to 802.11n only and choosing the wireless channel by hand fixed the problem, but configuration shouldn't be this much hassle. What's more, we didn't have these problems when we originally tested the router in *Shopper* November 2006 using the DWA-645 CardBus adaptor.

Transfer speeds were good, but we've seen better from Linksys's WAG325N (see awards, left). Sadly, we couldn't get a connection at 25m no matter which settings we tried.

D-Link's DKT-410 kit is good value with a stunning warranty. However, since we first reviewed this router, other products have surpassed it, and we weren't impressed with the USB adaptor. If you want a fast wireless router for your cable broadband connection, Netgear's RangeMax Next Wireless Router (*Labs*, *Shopper* June 2007) is a better choice.

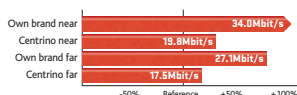
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ 11-year warranty
- ☒ Router can be difficult to set up
- ☒ Faster routers available

WIRELESS ROUTER Draft 802.11N (300Mbit/s), four 10/100 Ethernet ports, one WAN port (Ethernet), one USB port, UPnP, USB 802.11n wireless adaptor
PART CODE DKT-410
SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.dlink.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



LINKSYS WRT150N

★★★★★

£59 inc VAT

Linksys's WRT150N router is the cheapest Draft-N router we've seen so far. Installation was simple, with the CD-based setup wizard holding our hand throughout the step-by-step process. There's also a handy booklet with installation details in case you get stuck, which is unlikely, as Linksys has made the process as simple as it could possibly be.

We first tested the WRT150N with our Centrino notebook. Initially we couldn't get a connection, but after realising that our notebook wouldn't work with TKIP encryption, we switched the router to AES. We got some fairly good results at close and long ranges but nothing really to impress us. The WRT150N was slower with Centrino than any router in our recent *Labs* (*Shopper* June 2007), and we couldn't get a stable connection at 25m.

Switching to Linksys's Wireless-N CardBus adaptor (£48), we found that it wasn't supplied with Windows Vista drivers. However, Linksys's website provided them for download, and the card installed without problems.

We were initially disappointed by slow transfer rates, and again we couldn't get a stable connection at 25m. Trying a couple of different channels, we found that using channel six made a huge difference to performance and produced some excellent results. The speed at close range was particularly good, while we were very impressed with the 11.8Mbit/s at 25m. Using the CardBus adaptor you'd easily be able to browse the internet anywhere in your house, and share files at close range.

There are Draft-N routers that perform better, but none that is as keenly priced as the WRT150N. With excellent performance using Linksys's CardBus adaptor, it's a great choice for those who want Draft-N performance on a budget. We only wish the Centrino performance was a bit better.

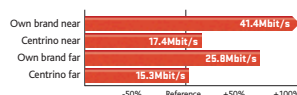
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ Very low price
- ☒ Fast Draft-N performance
- ☒ Poor Centrino range

WIRELESS ROUTER Draft 802.11n (300Mbit/s), four 10/100 Ethernet ports, one WAN port
PART CODE WRT150N
SUPPLIER www.lambda-tek.com
DETAILS www.linksys.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



EDIMAX IC-7000

★

£126 inc VAT

Edimax's IC-7000 is a network IP security camera with motorised pan and tilt. It can be controlled with the bundled software or a web-based interface, both of which can also control up to three other IC-7000 cameras.

Installation was tricky at first, as the manual has been poorly translated and we couldn't get the software to work on our Windows Vista PC. Checking Edimax's website we found an updated version of the software for Vista, which we downloaded and installed. This didn't improve matters much, though – it was slow to load, kept crashing and we needed to reinstall it twice to get it working again. Fortunately, the camera's web interface is easy to use and didn't cause us any stability problems, so we ditched the software.

The IC-7000 can be set to record at three resolutions: 160x120, which is too small to make out any detail, 320x240 and 640x480. At 640x480, images were streamed between 4fps and 8fps, although we reached the un-heady heights of 11fps for a few seconds. This is far below the IC-7000's claimed 30fps. Even worse, the record settings allow for only 1, 3, 5 or 10 frames per second, so recordings have no chance of meeting the camera's specified frame rate.

Footage of stationary objects looked fine, but movement emphasised how slow the frame rate is, and the camera could easily miss someone who walked past quickly. You can set motion detection zones, which enables you to use the camera for security, but it is very slow to react. To get past undetected, you simply have to walk close to it or move very quickly. Annoyingly, pictures from the IC-7000 are overexposed when objects are close, and the image often disappears, replaced by a white screen.

Overexposure and slow speeds make the IC-7000 unsuitable as a security system. There are better IP cameras available, and we recommend D-Link's non-motorised DCS-2120 (*Shopper* July 2007). It costs £26 more, but it has better image quality and is more reliable.

Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ☒ Quick web configuration
- ☒ Poor recording frame rates
- ☒ Footage often overexposed

NETWORK IP CAMERA 640x480 resolution, 10/100 Ethernet port, motion detection, SD card slot, TV output.
PART CODE IC-7000
SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.edimax.co.uk

AWARDS 2007 BROADBAND

EXPERT'S REPORT

As with our PC and notebook awards, our broadband awards go to companies rather than products. There's only so much a review can tell you about a service, and we wanted to factor in reliability, customer support, price and all the little things that give one company an edge over the rest.

The best way to do this was to look at your answers to two questions from our reader survey: "Are you planning on staying with your broadband supplier?" and "Would you recommend your supplier?" The first question tells us whether you're happy with your supplier, while the second lets us know if you think you've got such a great deal that you have to tell your friends about it. By averaging the answers to these questions we picked our Best Broadband Supplier 2007 and three Commended Broadband Suppliers 2007.

Matt Smith

Notebooks and networks expert

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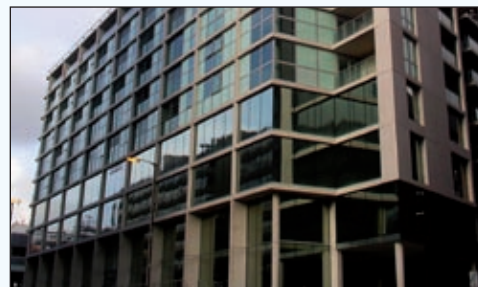
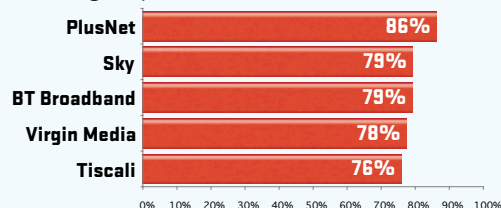


PLUSNET

Founded in 1997 and now officially a subsidiary of BT, PlusNet topped the charts as your favourite broadband supplier. As well as having the second-highest percentage of readers who plan to stay with the service, the company also had the highest percentage of readers who would recommend it to others. This is high praise indeed, as *Computer Shopper* readers will recommend only those products they know to be good.

PlusNet's success is based on a number of factors, but the quality of its service is one of the main ones. Everyone with a PlusNet broadband account gets access to a web-based control panel from which they can control their service. From here, users can do everything from monitoring their access and download quotas to contacting customer support. The control panel is well designed, easy to use and provides enough information to keep even the most demanding customers happy.

Top 5 performers: Would you recommend your broadband provider to someone else? (Percentage answering 'Yes')



Readers who plan to keep the service	81%
Readers who would recommend the service	86%
Shopper reader market share	4%

Every customer also gets free firewall and anti-virus email protection. Both services are controlled from the member's control panel, so there's no software to install on your PC, and any computer connected to your broadband connection is protected.

The stunning reaction to this service combined with excellent tools make PlusNet the clear winner of our first Best Broadband Provider award.

SALES 0845 140 0080 DETAILS www.plus.net
FOUNDED 1997 EMPLOYEES 200



SKY

Sky launched its broadband package only last year, but it has already become a firm favourite with our readers. More of you are planning to stick with the service than with any other broadband provider.

Sky's biggest benefit is that its broadband service is available for free to its satellite customers, so you can pay one bill and get TV, broadband and telephone. If the basic service isn't good enough, Sky offers an attractive range of upgrades that increase download speeds and caps. This excellent value has clearly impressed you, and Sky deserves its Commended Broadband Provider award.

SALES 08702 404040
DETAILS www.sky.com
FOUNDED 1989 EMPLOYEES 13,344

Readers who plan to keep the service	84%
Readers who would recommend the service	79%
Shopper reader market share	4%



BT BROADBAND

BT introduced high-speed internet access to the UK. Since then, the company has been required to open its network to competitors, making this market tougher than ever.

Still, this doesn't seem to have affected sales too badly, and BT Broadband enjoys the second highest share of *Shopper* readers, with 13.7 per cent of you signed up. This also makes the company the largest supplier of ADSL in the UK.

If BT can improve the number of *Shopper* readers who are planning to stay with the service, it could do even better next year and perhaps even win the top spot.

SALES 0800 328 6738
DETAILS www.btbroadband.com
FOUNDED 1977 EMPLOYEES 104,400

Readers who plan to keep the service	79%
Readers who would recommend the service	79%
Shopper reader market share	14%

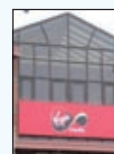


VIRGIN MEDIA

Formed from NTL and Telewest, Virgin Media is one of the largest content providers in the UK. Its broadband business is huge, and the company caters for the largest share of *Shopper* readers, with 28 per cent of you using its cable broadband service. What's more, an impressive 81 per cent plan to stick with the service.

Over the next year Virgin Media's challenge is to improve its customer support even further, and to increase its market share. If it gets the support right, we wouldn't be surprised if Virgin Media topped the tables next year.

SALES 0845 840 7777
DETAILS www.virginmedia.com
FOUNDED 2006 EMPLOYEES 12,480



Readers who plan to keep the service	81%
Readers who would recommend the service	78%
Shopper reader market share	28%